PSC-2107: 20th Century Political Thought

Spring 2018
Dr. Craig French
craigfrench@gwu.edu

Class: Monday / Wednesday, 4:45 – 6:00pm, PHIL 108
Office Hours: TBD

Class Aims

This class in the field of political theory (also called political philosophy) introduces students to a select number of themes and concerns in recent political thought. Students will be encouraged to investigate, analyze and evaluate the ideas and arguments they encounter to help them better understand our present political condition.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Offer an account of the origins of a set of ideas that have become central to our thinking about politics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

2. Conduct close and careful reading of texts that aim to elucidate the nature of politics from a philosophical/theoretical perspective.

3. Write well-structured essays that present a clear argumentative thesis, supported by sound reasoning and appropriately chosen textual evidence.

4. Evaluate arguments and ideas in political theory for their truth and/or validity.

5. Apply the ideas and concepts of political theory to better understand, evaluate and criticize the contemporary political world.

Themes for Discussion

A class of this sort could not possibly cover all of the theoretical responses to the tumultuous events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, such as the Russian revolution, the rise of totalitarianism, the Second World War, the Cold War, decolonization, the technological revolution, the emergence of the social democratic welfare state and the culture of human rights, and the mass and rapid movement of people and capital.

Therefore, we will zero in on a few of the most important and influential theoretical contributions by thinkers and writers responding to these events. Our discussions will therefore cover the following themes and concerns:
• The problem of political activity in the era of the bureaucratic state (Weber and Williams).

• Political deception and totalitarianism (Arendt).

• Theorizing domination, oppression and the struggle for equality (De Beauvoir, Du Bois, Foucault).

• Our changing understanding of mass democracy (Schumpeter, Habermas).

• Distributive justice, the politics of identity and racial injustice (Rawls, Nozick, IM Young and Mills).

• The antagonism between the idea that we owe special moral obligations to our compatriots (nationalism) and the idea that our moral obligations to others hold universally, irrespective of their nationality (cosmopolitanism). We will consider this debate with specific reference to the ethics of immigration (Miller and Carens).

Required Books

You will need to buy the following books for this class:


These books will be made available for purchase at the university bookstore. They are also available from Amazon.com, sometimes at a considerable discount, especially if bought used. I encourage you to buy them from wherever is cheapest.

Other required readings will be made available in PDF format via Blackboard.

Learning Tasks

These tasks have been designed to allow you to develop the skills necessary to accomplish the learning objectives listed above. As the deadline for each task approaches, you will be given a prompt containing detailed instructions to follow.
You must complete all papers to receive a passing grade for this class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short Paper</strong></td>
<td>12 Feb</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a paper (3-5 pages) that interprets a section of text, summarizing the argument of the piece and identifying the most important issues worthy of scholarly consideration and theoretical reflection.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Long Paper**  | 12 March | 40         |
| Write a paper (8-10 pages) that engages in criticism of an argument or idea we have encountered in the reading. The paper should defend a thesis, and your evidence for the thesis should draw on the texts we have been reading and at least one other scholarly source. |

| **Final Exam**  | TBD      | 35         |
| The final exam will be a closed-book, hand-written exam. You will write two answers chosen from a pre-circulated list of questions. You will be able to prepare your answers in advance of the test, but on the day you will not be allowed to use your notes. Your answers will take the form of two “mini” essays, with an introduction, body of argument and conclusion. You will be expected to draw upon the semester’s work and write about the ways in which the ideas we have encountered have helped you to understand a real world issue in a new way. |

**Grading Policies**

I use this grading scale to assess written work: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, F.

The following guidelines cover the main grade categories for written works; + and – are used when the errors indicated below become more serious or pervasive, or to penalize late papers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Content and Argument</th>
<th>Structure, Style and Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>Excellent grasp of the theoretical issues at stake, demonstrated by a logical and original analysis, perhaps even suggestive of a further research agenda, question or puzzle. Argument shows sensitivity to issues of textual</td>
<td>Clear introductory thesis statement, appropriate and efficient use of quotations to illustrate arguments, no spelling or grammatical errors, consistent use of a recognized academic citation method, pagination,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
interpretation and is attentive to theoretical lacuna in the sources under investigation. Ample and appropriate use of evidence drawn from primary texts to ground a sufficiently well-developed, clearly identifiable and plausible thesis, underpinning the entirety of the paper and to which all sub-arguments are directed. Draws upon other relevant material. Student renders opposing arguments sympathetically – making the “best case” – before criticizing them. Student explores objections to his or her own arguments and poses a possible rebuttal to those objections too.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Good Sound grasp of the main lines of argument under examination. Textual evidence is generally well used to support most points, though sometimes in place of an argument rather than in support of one. Some kind of (largely sound) thesis is offered but needs to be developed further. Little or no effort to engage possible objections to the student’s own argument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Language is prone to colloquialism or is imprecise and/or contains a number of obvious grammatical and spelling errors. No clear statement of thesis, so that one has to be sympathetically reconstructed by the reader (at best).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I strive to award grades that reflect the quality of the work that I receive. I take this responsibility very seriously and go to great lengths to ensure that you get the grade that you deserve (which, it must be said, is not always the grade that you will want). I do not revise a grade unless it turns out that I have made an error or miscalculation.

I award “A” grades very rarely and reserve them for superlative work that is truly special or outstanding. Most students in my class receive some variation of a “B.” This is a good grade, one that you should feel proud of. A “C” means: things aren’t going too well and we need to work on this.

Getting a top grade in this class is not just about putting in a certain amount of effort or following instructions. Those are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for excellence. In addition, you will need to demonstrate intellectual curiosity, philosophical insight and courageousness in your writing to get the best grades. No one is “naturally” good at this kind of thing. These skills and talents must be learned, practiced and refined over time, which you will do by completing the required exercises and learning from your mistakes.

In my experience, students’ grades improve as the semester progresses. This is because with practice, they acquire the skills necessary for success. So if you feel like you are struggling, or you are disappointed by a grade, please don’t feel discouraged. Get in touch, and we can sit down to discuss strategies for doing better next time.

**Late Work**

No extensions are offered on the assignments except in cases of properly documented illness and personal emergency. If I receive an assignment up to 24 hours after the due date without such documentation, one notch on the grading scale (i.e. a +/-) will be deducted from the grade for the paper. One more deduction will be made for every further 24-hour period that the paper is late.
**Plagiarism**

You must ensure that you have read, understood and accepted all of the university’s rules and regulations on academic dishonesty, particularly the rules on plagiarism.

The university defines plagiarism as:

> “intentionally or knowingly representing the words, ideas, or sequence of ideas of another as one’s own in any academic exercise; or failure to attribute any of the following: quotations, paraphrases, or borrowed information.”

**Do not plagiarize!** Anyone who plagiarizes in an assignment will, at a minimum, receive an F in that assignment and will be referred to the Academic Integrity Council. Depending on the severity of the offense, further sanctions may also include an F for the whole class and suspension or expulsion from the university.

If in doubt, err on the side of caution and always cite your sources. If you are confused or have questions about this, email me to ask for guidance.

**Class Attendance**

I expect you to attend every class and will track attendance using a sign-in sheet. You are permitted three absences for which no explanation is required. After this, any additional absence will result in a one-notch deduction (a +/-) from your overall class grade.

Absences for medical or other reasons of a serious, personal nature will be excused, provided that they are properly documented (e.g. by a doctor’s note).

**Electronic Devices in Class**

Recent studies suggest that students who use computers in the classroom perform less well on final exams than those who do not,² and this may be because handwriting notes rather than typing them is more conducive to deep learning.³ For this reason, I do not permit the use of laptops in class except for reasons of medical necessity. Please provide me with appropriate documentation if this applies to you.

You may not record any portion of these classes on an electronic device. Please silence all cell phones and mobile devices and put them away for the duration of our meetings.

---

¹ George Washington University Code of Academic Integrity, p. 1. Available at: [https://studentconduct.gwu.edu/sites/studentconduct.gwu.edu/files/downloads/160912%20Code%20of%20Academic%20Integrity%20Final.pdf](https://studentconduct.gwu.edu/sites/studentconduct.gwu.edu/files/downloads/160912%20Code%20of%20Academic%20Integrity%20Final.pdf)
³ [https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/)
Further Assistance

If you have any questions relating to the class that can be easily answered over email, please contact me at craigfrench@gwu.edu. I will do my best to respond within 24 hours, except during the weekend, when I do not answer emails.

Before emailing me with a question, ask yourself: can this be answered in a reply stretching to only a couple of lines? If the answer is yes, then please go ahead and email me. If the answer is no, then the matter requires an in-person conversation. You should come to my office hours instead of emailing.

Disability Support Services

I strive to ensure that my class and its contents are accessible to all, regardless of learning style and physical or sensory ability. If you would like to talk to me in confidence about any accessibility issues, please feel free to reach out to me, in person or by email.

If you require formal accommodations to suit your individual needs, please contact GWU’s Disability Support Services team. More information can be found at: https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/

Class Schedule and Assigned Reading

I. WHAT IS POLITICAL THEORY?

Wednesday 17 January
• Introduction, distribution of syllabus, discussion of class aims

Monday 22 January
• Sheldon Wolin “Political Philosophy and Philosophy” (via PDF)

II. POLITICS

Wednesday 24 January
• Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” (via PDF)

Monday 29 January
• Bernard Williams, “Politics and Moral Character” (via PDF)

Wednesday 31 January
• Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics” (via PDF)

Monday 5 February
• Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, selections (via PDF)
III. OPPRESSION, DISCIPLINE AND POWER

Wednesday 7 February
• Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Forethought, chapters I-VI, IX

Monday 12 February
• Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, selections (via PDF)

Wednesday 14 February
• Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, selections (via PDF)

Monday 19 February
• No class

Wednesday 21 February
• Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, selections (via PDF)

V. DEMOCRACY

Monday 26 February
• Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, pp. 240-249 and chs. 11-12 (via PDF)

Wednesday 28 February
• Jurgen Habermas, “Three Normative Models of Democracy” (via PDF)

VI. JUSTICE

Monday 5 March
• John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, Part I

Wednesday 7 March
• John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, Part II

Monday 19 March
• John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, Part III

Wednesday 21 March
• Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, selections (via PDF)

Monday 26 March
• Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, selections (via PDF)

Wednesday 28 March
• Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Introduction and chs. 1-2

Monday 2 April
• Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, chs. 3-4
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 4 April</td>
<td>Iris Marion Young, <em>Justice and the Politics of Difference</em>, chs. 6-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VII. NATIONALISM, COSMOPOLITANISM AND GLOBAL JUSTICE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 18 April</td>
<td>David Miller, <em>On Nationality</em>, chs. 1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 23 April</td>
<td>David Miller, <em>On Nationality</em>, chs. 4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 25 April</td>
<td>Joseph Carens, “The Case for Open Borders,” in <em>The Ethics of Immigration</em> (via PDF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 30 April</td>
<td>David Miller, <em>Strangers in Our Midst: The Political Philosophy of Immigration</em>, chs. 3-4 (via PDF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Exam, Date TBD</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>